Planning and Evaluating Highly Successful Foreign Language Programs

Starting with the End in Mind

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FOREWORD

The National Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century call for programs that produce students who are both linguistically and culturally proficient, who know “how, when, and why, to say what to whom.”

With that nationally agreed-upon goal as a starting point, beginning with the end in mind in language education today means designing and implementing programs that prepare students from the start of their language courses to transfer what they learn in the classroom to real-world situations, and to be able use a language well and in culturally appropriate ways to accomplish real-world tasks.

The focus in language classrooms then naturally becomes performance-based teaching and assessment that lead to ever-increasing levels of learner proficiency in language and cultural awareness and competence.

This guide to best practice in language learning and local reform of world-language programs is designed to help educators design programs that reach those goals—not only in language learning but also in language-education reform itself. The authors of the guide, all veteran and highly acclaimed educators, have put forward a succinct and practical guide for moving world-language reform locally in a backward-from-excellence way. The guide is especially valuable for the concrete indicators provided related to what to look for locally to determine if local practice is best practice. I am confident that you will find this guide of great use in moving reform forward.

Grant Wiggins
INTRODUCTION

Programs within the K–12 span can realistically produce students who demonstrate, as a minimum, Intermediate-High proficiency, according to the ACTFL scale.

Highly effective programs achieve this through the following:

- Offering uninterrupted, continuous long sequences of study, preferably beginning in the early grades
- Integrating curriculum, assessment, and instruction to achieve performance goals that align with national and state foreign language standards
- Establishing language performance targets for various points along the language learning continuum
- Collecting a combination of internal and external performance evidence at regular intervals
- Systematically reviewing assessment evidence to inform and adjust the instructional program from day-to-day and year-to-year
- Ensuring that there are opportunities, where applicable, for heritage learners to maintain and expand their range of proficiencies
- Incorporating into professional development ongoing professional dialogue and reflective practice that focus on student learning

Following the principles and processes of Understanding by Design (UbD), this document specifies desired results, understandings, essential questions, knowledge, skills, and direct evidence for each of the key stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of a well-articulated K–12 language program.

BEFORE YOU START

Students, parents, administrators, and teachers want and deserve high-quality educational programs. Such programs are characterized by (but are not limited to) clearly stated goals for student learning, well-informed and skilled teachers who enable students to reach their goals, program designs that allow for continuous growth over the span of years, and evaluative tools that assess how well students are achieving program goals.

This document, Starting with the End in Mind: Planning and Evaluating Highly Successful Foreign Language Programs, is designed to support those who are planning a new foreign language program as well as those who are assessing an existing program. It suggests opportunities for them to be catalysts for systemic change, collaborative learning, and research-based decisions in designing and implementing high-quality programs.

The document guides the design of these programs by defining what they look like and providing acceptable evidence of program quality, so that students can make continuous progress in the languages they are studying from level to level, within and among schools. In essence, it defines the characteristics of programs that produce successful world citizens who can demonstrate intercultural competence through meaningful use of languages other than English.
Understanding by Design

Building on the concept of backward design, Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe have developed a structured approach called Understanding by Design (UbD) for planning programs, curricula, and instructional units. Their approach involves clarifying goals, identifying deep understandings, posing essential questions, and specifying clear evidence that goals, understandings, and core learning have been attained.

This process involves three interrelated stages for developing an action plan for a high-quality language program:

**Stage One: Identifying Desired Results**

Enduring understandings, essential questions, knowledge, and skills are woven into curriculum publications, documents, standards, and scope-and-sequence materials.

**Stage Two: Determining Acceptable Evidence**

Varied types of evidence are identified that will determine whether students are achieving the desired results.

**Stage Three: Designing Learning Activities**

Prior and current experiences as well as instructional tasks are aligned with stages one and two so that the desired results are obtained based on identified, varied evidence.

At the action-plan level, these three stages are best realized as a fusion of research, best practices, shared and sustained inquiry, consensus building, and initiatives that involve all stakeholders.

1. **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

Backward design is an increasingly common approach to planning and implementing a curriculum. As its name implies, backward design involves developing plans based on defining clear goals, determining acceptable evidence of having achieved the goals, then working “backward” to identify what actions need to be taken to close the gap between the current status and the desired result.

- What kinds of evidence will inform stakeholders that a program is one of high quality?

- What does it look like as students advance toward meeting their goals?

- What does it look like when students have reached their goals and attained the desired results, that is, what should they understand, know, and be able to do?
2. KEY STAKEHOLDERS

While no single person or group of persons carries sole responsibility for planning and implementing an effective instructional program, the degree to which each individual stakeholder and each group of stakeholders fulfill their particular roles has significant impact on the effectiveness of any program.

This section defines the contributions of the following stakeholders to the desired outcomes of high-quality programs:

- Instructional Leaders
- Teachers
- Policymakers
- Parents

A section has been devoted to the roles and responsibilities of each of these key stakeholders with evidence to demonstrate stakeholders’ effectiveness in fulfilling those roles.

It must be noted that while stakeholders’ roles have been separated so that any one group can easily identify its own responsibilities for a high-quality program, it is important that all stakeholders be familiar not only with their own roles but also with the roles of other stakeholders. When all stakeholders work together to make the contributions each can best make, excellent programs result.

Instructional Leaders

Desired Results:

Instructional leaders are responsible for coordinating the development and implementation of an articulated curriculum. They provide resources, monitor quality of language instruction, determine the duration and frequency of instruction, and ensure that a variety of evidence of student work is used effectively. They assess the quality of the program based on the evidence of student learning. Moreover, they understand that their decisions affect student achievement and that their direct support is critical to the existence of a high-quality program. In some districts, these responsibilities may rest solely with the building principal; in other districts, these responsibilities may be distributed among and/or shared by district-level personnel (such as curriculum directors, subject-matter supervisors, or coordinators) and by school-based staff (such as assistant principals, department chairs, and lead teachers).

Self-Assessment Questions for Instructional Leaders:

- What does research say about the impact of variables such as program model, duration, frequency, and instructional practices on learner outcomes in language learning?
- How will I ensure that professional development is reflected in student learning?
- What constitutes evidence of high-quality language instruction and student achievement?
Self-Assessment Evidence for Instructional Leaders:

Essential

- Decisions that respect the integrity of the discipline
- Human and material resources that support the development of curriculum, assessment, and instruction that is congruent with national standards
- Scheduling that acknowledges research findings in second-language acquisition
- Curriculum documents aligned with state and/or national standards
- High-quality teachers in all classrooms
- Observation protocols and teacher evaluation reports
- High-quality, content-specific professional development, including provisions for coaching and mentoring
- Professional dialogue among teachers, counselors, and administrators within and across schools
- Use of student-performance data that results in continuous student progress from level to level, year to year, and building to building
- Enrollment data that shows students sustain language study as long as possible

Recommended

- Attendance at school and community events pertaining to the language program
- Public statements that are supportive of language programs
- Active partnerships with other constituencies to support language learning

Teachers

Desired Results:

The curriculum for schools and districts determines what students should know, understand, and be able to do. Teachers are responsible for assuring that students meet the curricular expectations. With this in mind, they use multiple sources of evidence of student learning to continually inform, shape, and improve instruction.

Self-Assessment Questions for Teachers:

- What does effective foreign language instruction look like?
- How will I know whether my students are improving their language and intercultural proficiencies?
- How can I use evidence of student learning to make informed decisions that improve student performance?

Self-Assessment Evidence for Teachers:

Planning

- Units and lessons align with district curriculum, reflecting national and state standards.
- Units and lessons follow design standards of Understanding by Design.
- Intercultural competence is developed in every unit and/or lesson.
- The diverse learner characteristics of students are considered in the teacher’s instructional planning.
- Lesson plans include multiple resources, such as authentic documents, technology-delivered resources, and commercial publications and textbooks.
Policymakers

Desired Results:
Policymakers enact measures that enable well-articulated language programs and provide consistent support. They understand that their decisions regarding financial, human, and material resources have a direct impact on the program’s ability to achieve its stated goals.

Self-Assessment Questions for Policymakers:
- How can I provide leadership by working collaboratively with constituents to support the language program?
- How do my decisions affect student achievement in foreign languages?
- How do I provide the resources and funding necessary for a high-quality language program?

Self-Assessment Evidence for Policymakers:

esential
- Policies are in place that enable well-articulated language programs.
- There is adequate financial support to allow high-quality language programs.

recommended
- Consortia of public and private entities exist that support language learning.
- Attendance and participation on the part of policymakers at public events pertaining to the language program is evident.
- Policymakers make public statements that are supportive of language learning.

Instruction

- Teachers use information that they collect during instruction to inform immediate and long-term instructional decisions.
- Teachers and students communicate purposefully and meaningfully as listeners, speakers, readers, writers, and viewers.
- There is more student activity than teacher activity in most lessons. Student activity includes student-to-student interactions as well as teacher-to-student interactions.
- Students work independently, in pairs, and in small groups.
- The learning environment is positive and supportive, encouraging students to take risks as language learners.
- Teachers have a repertoire of error-correction strategies and know when to use them appropriately.
- All students are guided to use all levels of thinking skills.
- The physical environment, including displays of student work, is instructional, motivational, and informative.

Assessment

- Teachers use a body of diverse evidence, collected over time, to determine whether students have met expectations at the curricular, unit, and lesson levels.
- Teachers use systematic review and analysis of student performance to guide instructional decisions.
- Teachers and students use self-assessments to reflect routinely on the teaching and learning process.
Parents

Desired Results:
While a well-articulated language program can exist without parental involvement, parents and community members play a critical role in ensuring that high-quality language-learning programs are implemented and maintained in the schools. Parents express the value of language study and the purpose for learning a language, which is real-life communication. They understand that there are numerous ways for their children to demonstrate the progress they are making.

Self-Assessment Questions for Parents:
• How will learning other languages benefit my children now and in the future?
• How will I know that my children are learning to use the language in the real world?
• How will I know that my children are learning to interact successfully with people from other places and cultures?

Self-Assessment Evidence for Parents:
• Parents ensure that their children study languages.
• Parents express the value of language study with their children, other parents, family and community members, as well as school-board members.
• Parents have realistic expectations about probable outcomes of their children’s language-learning experience.

3. ACTION PLANNING

It is unlikely that any program will meet all of the criteria included in this document. For that reason, development of an action plan is essential to achieve the goal of a high-quality language program. It should be noted that schools and districts will begin at different places in the planning process because they will begin with differing strengths and needs. Nevertheless, the process is applicable to planning for both new and existing programs.

Step One: Getting Started
Instructional leaders will start the process—a building administrator at the school level or an appropriate instructional leader at the district level. The site or district instructional leader
• Identifies the key stakeholders and forms a steering committee
• Ensures that all members of the steering committee understand the basic principles of UbD, as these underlie the organization of this document
• Ensures that the members of the steering committee are familiar with the entire document so that they understand that the roles and tasks of primary stakeholders are interrelated and interdependent
• Forms a task force consisting of multiple representatives for each constituency
**Step Two: Assessing the Status Quo**

Assessing what currently exists in the language program will be important in determining the next steps. The following actions are suggested:

- Each group of constituents completes a common checklist and each person in the group, an individual checklist.
- Each group uses the individual answers of its members to form a composite checklist.
- All constituent groups meet together to review composite results. These results will determine where the school or district is situated on the continuum of criteria for a strong, well-articulated program.

Once internal perceptions of the status quo have been articulated, it is important for a school or district to validate its self-assessment through an external evaluation conducted by a foreign-language professional who is well versed in current research, theory, and best practices. External validation is critical to ensure the accuracy of the self-assessment as it forms the basis for determining where a school or district is in relation to where ideally it should be.

**Step Three: Identifying and Prioritizing Areas of Need**

Once the status quo has been established and the group is aware of where the program is, in light of where it should be, the next steps are to identify needs and set priorities. The steering committee develops a chart that lists all of the quality indicators that are not part of the existing program or that will need to be planned for a new program. The committee also sets priorities for the allocation of resources, including time and effort. In collaboration with the task force, the steering committee then identifies the persons responsible for carrying out tasks that address the program’s needs. A sample chart follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE</th>
<th>TIME FRAME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify how well students are making continuous progress from level to level and year to year within and across schools. Provide the data.</td>
<td>Teachers Instructional Leaders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify the unique needs and achievement gaps found in curriculum, assessment, and instruction for foreign languages.</td>
<td>Teachers Instructional Leaders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify monetary sources that will provide the funding needed to improve the frequency and duration of instruction.</td>
<td>Policymakers Instructional Leaders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify authentic and age-appropriate community-based activities that support students’ language use.</td>
<td>Parents Teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Step Four: Designing the Action Plan**

The persons responsible for addressing the quality indicators identified in step three develop an action plan. Before the individual action plans are implemented, the steering committee reviews them to assure that the actions are taken in a coherent and coordinated fashion and avoid duplication of efforts.
Appendix A: Checklist for Observing Foreign Language Instruction for Secondary School Students

✔ 1. Instructional Management
  - The teacher makes clear to students that they are learning to use language in the real world and that assessments give them valuable feedback on their progress toward that goal.
  - Instructional units have real-world language-performance goals.
  - Learning experiences address different communicative modes (i.e., interpersonal, interpretive, presentational/language skills) that are aligned with curricular, unit, and lesson objectives.
  - The various parts of the lesson connect in a coherent way, building toward increased ability to understand or express meaning on a given topic or theme.
  - Instructional plans incorporate opportunities to use previously acquired language in a variety of contexts.
  - Instructional plans provide evidence for students to learn that language and culture are inextricably linked.
  - The physical environment of the classroom reflects the language and cultures studied.

✔ 2. Language Use
  - The teacher uses the target language almost exclusively and encourages the students to do so as well.
  - The teacher uses a variety of strategies to make language comprehensible.
  - The teacher avoids the use of translation by using verbal and nonverbal strategies such as circumlocution, body language, and visuals.
  - The teacher demonstrates advanced proficiency in both the target language and English.

✔ 3. Learning Experiences
  - The teacher uses visuals, concrete objects, hands-on experiences, and context to present and practice new vocabulary.
  - Grammar is taught as a tool for communication. It is not the focus or the goal of the course, unit, or lesson.
  - The teacher avoids meaningless, rote drills, ensuring that all practice is meaning-based.
  - The teacher provides frequent, varied classroom opportunities for students to use their language skills to communicate in real-world contexts.
  - The teacher assures that there is more student talk than teacher talk as student proficiency increases.
  - At every level of instruction, the teacher provides activities that lead toward student autonomy of expression in unrehearsed communication.
  - In every class session, the teacher provides pair and/or group activities that engage students in communication for real-world interaction.
  - The teacher implements language tasks that frequently incorporate cultural practices, products, and/or perspectives.
  - The teacher provides opportunities for students to engage in cultural observation and analysis.
Appendix B: Glossary

**Authentic material:** Material written by native speakers for native speakers. For example, students read a train schedule from the target country within an activity that requires them to make travel plans when in that country.

**Backward design:** An approach to designing a curriculum or unit that begins with the end in mind—the targeted results, such as content standards or understandings—and designs toward that end (Understanding by Design, p. 336).

**Best practices:** State-of-the-art teaching practices that are generally acknowledged as facilitating learning.

**Constituencies:** Generally used to describe all those with a stake in a learning situation, for example, students, teachers, administrators, school staff, parents, policymakers, and the general community.

**Culture:** As defined in the Standards for Foreign Language Learning.

**Diverse learner characteristics:** May include, but are not limited to, ethnic, racial, and linguistic characteristics; academic readiness, preferred learning styles, interests, background knowledge, and abilities.

**External assessment:** An assessment developed by an outside agency and designed to meet psychometric criteria of validity and reliability. An example is a standardized test.

**High-quality world-language teacher:** A teacher who is able to communicate at no less than the advanced level of proficiency in the language that he or she is expected to teach. High-quality teachers must have the ability to use developmentally appropriate methodologies that result in students being capable of performing real-world tasks in the language studied.

**Integrated performance assessment:** An assessment that consists of an interrelated series of tasks designed to allow students to demonstrate their progress in meeting the performance and proficiency goals of a unit. A well-designed integrated performance assessment task collects evidence in all three communicative modes: interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational. An example is an assessment in which students are asked to read a personality survey (Interpretive Reading), discuss in a small group what they read (Interpersonal Communication), and either write a story or give an oral presentation using the personality survey to describe their favorite movie character (Presentational Writing or Speaking).

**Intercultural competence:** The ability to interact effectively with persons from another culture, knowing how, when, and why to say what to whom (Standards for Foreign Language Learning).

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4. Assessment

- The teacher measures student language proficiency in a variety of ways that focus on what students can do with the language, not just what they know about it.
- The teacher gives more weight to performance assessments in grading than to measures of student knowledge about language (i.e., vocabulary and grammar).
- The teacher conducts formative and summative assessments that measure attainment of unit and lesson objectives in terms of language performance and knowledge and cultural competence.
- The teacher modifies instructional and assessment strategies as a result of formative and summative assessments.
- The teacher selects from a repertoire of research-supported feedback strategies that have been shown to improve language performance.
- The teacher provides opportunities for students to assess their own language performance and cultural competence.

5. Materials

- The teacher uses a variety of instructional materials to support language-learning objectives.
- The teacher uses authentic materials, designing tasks appropriate to the language proficiency of the learners.
- The teacher incorporates authentic materials that reflect cultural practices, products, and perspectives.
- The teacher and students use the appropriate technology to develop real-world language and cultural competencies.
Internally developed assessment: An assessment developed by a teacher, school, or district to measure the learning of students in a particular program. Examples are daily quizzes and district tests.

Interpersonal communication: Direct, spontaneous oral or written communication that allows for negotiation of meaning between two or among more individuals (primarily productive abilities: speaking, writing, and showing). Examples are face-to-face communication, e-mail correspondence, and telephone conversations.

Interpretive communication: Receptive communication of oral or written communication in situations in which no negotiation of meaning is present (they are primarily receptive abilities: listening, reading, and viewing). Examples are reading a newspaper, listening to the radio, watching television, watching a play, and reading a novel.

Modes of communication: Interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational modes from the Standards for Foreign Language Learning

Multiple measures of student proficiency: A variety of assessments that provide a rich picture of what students know and are able to do. Examples are a portfolio of student work such as LinguaFolio, an oral performance on video, an online assessment such as STAMP or NOELLA, and a face-to-face interpersonal assessment such as the Oral Proficiency Interview (or its online equivalent, the OPIC).

Nonprint resources: Might include videos, DVDs, online music, and radio or television programs

Performance assessment: An assessment in which students demonstrate what they can do with the language in real-life situations. Performance assessments require students to apply knowledge to situations new to them but that they are likely to experience outside the classroom.

Performance task: A task that might be required in the real world and whose successful completion demonstrates the student’s learning. For example, the student is asked to interact with a speaker of the language to purchase an item for a reasonable price.

Perspectives: The philosophical perspectives of a culture, that is, meanings, attitudes, values, ideas

Practices: The behavioral practices of a culture, for example, patterns of social interactions

Presentational communication: Productive communication using oral or written language in situations in which no negotiation of meaning is present (primarily productive abilities: speaking, writing, and showing). Examples are making a speech, writing an essay, and presenting a play.

Print resources: Might include magazines, online materials, and textbooks

Products: The tangible and intangible products of a society, for example, books, tools, foods, laws, music, and games

Proficiency assessment: A direct or indirect measure of a learner’s ability to communicate meaningfully in situations that simulate the real world

Real world: An adjective that describes a situation or context that simulates what a student will encounter when using the language in the target culture.

Thematic unit: Curriculum designed to integrate instruction around a common theme, sometimes involving multiple content areas. For example, a unit on healthy lifestyles might include study of the diet and nutrition of the target culture as compared with the student’s own culture. Lessons within the unit might ask students to use math to calculate calories, science to examine the food pyramid, and social studies to study cultural influences on diet and nutrition.

Transfer: Flexible and secure use of knowledge and skills in a different context, setting, or situation from that in which it was originally learned, with few or no cues or supports.

The more complexities or variables the task contains, the more it demonstrates transfer and true understanding. An example is students that have studied tourist sites in Mexico. To see if they are able to transfer what they have learned to a real-world situation, students are asked to play the role of a travel agent specializing in travel to Mexico. Since travel agents have a number of different clients (in this case four different groups), they are asked to create an itinerary suited for each group, keeping in mind the possible interests and needs of the clients. The groups are (1) a family of five with young children; (2) a businessperson who is a history buff; (3) three college students with a limited budget; and (4) grandparents who love small towns, local crafts, and music.

Validated external proficiency instruments: Assessment instruments such as those listed in Appendix C that measure how well a student can use a language as described on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines and the ACTFL K–12 Performance Guidelines

Well-articulated language program: Describes a program in which students learn in a logical, uninterrupted sequence from level to level and from one school to the next.
Appendix C: Resources

The list of resources that follows provides additional helpful information to users of this document. These resources are divided into sections that address assessments, curriculum and instruction, external assessment sources, teacher preparation, and professional development. This list includes works referred to in the body of the document. Moreover, there are additional resources that the authors feel are potentially useful as districts work toward greater articulation of foreign language programs. In each case, online contact information is provided for the specific source.

Assessments

ACTFL Performance Guidelines for K–12 Learners
www.actfl.org

ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines
www.actfl.org

CAL (Center for Applied Linguistics) Online Assessment Bibliography
www.cal.org

Examples of proficiency assessments that have been validated nationally and can provide objective information about student learning in second languages:

- **ACTFL OPI/MOPI**: Oral Proficiency Interview and the Modified Oral Proficiency Interview
- **ELLOPA**: the Early Language Learning Oral Proficiency Assessment from the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL)
- **MLPA**: the Minnesota Language Proficiency Assessment from the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA)
- **NOELLA**: the National Online Early Language Learning Assessment in development through the Center for Applied Second Language Study (CASL)
- **SOPA**: the Student Oral Proficiency Assessment from CAL and the National K–12 Foreign Language Resource Center
- **STAMP**: the Standards-Based Measure of Proficiency Online assessment from Language Learning Solutions

Curriculum and Instruction

Publications

- ASCD (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) Curriculum Handbook
- Foreign Language Standards: Linking Research, Theories, and Practices
- Planning Curriculum for Learning World Languages
- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century
- Teaching Spanish with the Five Cs: A Blueprint for Success
- Understanding by Design (book and workbook)

Online Resources

- General Information About Language Instruction
  http://facultystaff.richmond.edu/~terry/tech.htm
- NADSFL (National Association of District Supervisors of Foreign Languages) Characteristics of Effective Foreign Language Instruction
  http://nadsfl.org/characteristics.htm
External Assessment Sources
Early Language Learning Oral Performance Assessment (ELLOPA),
www.cal.org
LinguaFolio, http://ncssfl.org/
Minnesota Language Proficiency Assessments (MLPA)
http://carla.acad.umn.edu/assessment/MLPA.html
National Online Early Language Learning Assessment (NOELLA),
http://noella.uoregon.edu
Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI), www.languagetesting.com
Simulated Oral Performance Assessment (SOPA),
www.cal.org
Standards-Based Measurement of Proficiency (STAMP),
www.onlinells.com

Teacher Preparation and Professional Development
INTASC Teacher Standards
(Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium)
http://people.uncw.edu/sherrilld/EDN355/intasc.htm
Languages and Linguistics Q&A, National Capital Language Resource
Center, http://www.nclrc.org/profdev
Teaching Foreign Languages K–12: A Library of Classroom Practices,
http://learner.org/resources/series185.html
Teaching Foreign Languages K–12 Workshop,
http://learner.org/resources/series201.html
Second Language Acquisition Web Center for Applied Second Language
Studies, University of Oregon, http://casls.uoregon.edu/sla.php

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